

Blackberry

Grow

Blackberries are fruits which grow on woody stems called canes. Canes are biennial, lasting up to two years. The underground root and crown of the blackberry plant are perennial. Each spring, the plants produce canes from buds on the crown and lateral underground stems.¹⁻³

Fun Fact: Blackberries are sometimes called caneberries. Historically, growers have called blackberries brambles.¹

Blackberries are a native North American fruit and can be found growing wild in different parts of the United States. Blackberries tend to grow better in hotter conditions and can tolerate fluctuating winter conditions—ideal for growers in the coastal plains and piedmont region of North Carolina. Blackberries prefer deep, well drained loamy soil. They need full sun and adequate soil moisture. Space blackberry plants 2-3 feet apart and rows 10-12 feet apart. It can take two years for canes to bear fruit.¹⁻⁵

Fun Fact: The tayberry, loganberry and boysenberry are hybrids of blackberries and raspberries.⁷

A Rose by Any Other Name

Blackberries belong to the genus *Rubus*, which is part of the Rose family. Other fruits in this family include apples, apricots, peaches, pears, and strawberries. These fruits have one thing in common. Flowers for these fruit plants have 5-7 white or pink petals around a central cluster of yellow stamens.¹⁻³

Fun Fact: Blackberry plants can be erect, semi-erect or trailing. Trailing types require a trellis.^{1-3,5}

Choose

Select blackberries that are fully ripe, but not overly so. Blackberries should be dry, clean, plump, bright and well colored. Avoid leaky, soft or dull blackberries or those with tops still attached. In the United States, blackberries are harvested from June through September. Popular U.S. varieties are Cherokee, Chester, Kotata, Marion, Ollalie, Texas Brazo and Waldo.⁷⁻⁸



Store

Blackberries are highly perishable and should be picked or purchased one or two days prior to use. Once harvested or purchased, they should be stored in the refrigerator. Before storing, remove any blackberries that are molded so they will not spoil other berries in the container.⁷⁻⁸

Fun Fact: Blackberry plants can live for up to 20 years.²

Use

The majority of blackberries grown in the United States are processed as individually quick frozen blackberries. Frozen berries can be kept 6 months to 1 year. A smaller percentage of the crop is sold fresh for markets in the U.S. and abroad.⁴

Blackberries are a very delicate fruit

Handle blackberries with care to prevent damage. Do not wash blackberries until ready to use. When ready to use, wash gently and pat dry with a single use paper towel. Blackberries freeze well. Lay them out in a single layer on a flat pan or baking sheet and place them in the freezer. Once frozen, put them in a freezer safe container or a plastic resealable bag. Blackberries are great on their own or mixed in oatmeal, cereal, yogurt or a salad. They are also tasty made into a puree or sauce. There are so many ways to serve and enjoy blackberries!⁷⁻⁸

Blackberry

Teach

Blackberry plants consist of several different parts: roots, canes, stems, thorns, leaves and fruit. Roots crown beneath the soil surface and provide a support system for the plant. Shoots or canes grow from buds on the crown and lateral stems. Canes can be thornless or thorny. Veiny, serrated leaves grow on the stems. Drupelets, the fruit, grow around a fleshy core called a receptacle and are held together by tiny hairs. The receptacle (torus) detaches with the fruit, when picked, as part of what we eat. The drupelets have the same structure as other drupes such as cherries or peaches but on a much smaller scale.¹⁻³

Fun Fact: Blackberries are not really a berry. They are an aggregate fruit. A blackberry is made up of many connecting, individual sections of fruit, each with its own seed that surrounds a central core. The aggregate structure increases the fiber content of the blackberry.^{1,4}

Class Activity

Materials Needed:

- Water (500 ml)
- Pot or pan
- Hotplate or stove
- 2 potholders or oven mitts
- Blackberries (1 cup)
- Cheesecloth
- Jar with lid (Use lid to prevent spilling the dye.)
- Paint brush, White construction paper

Steps:

1. Discuss with students how dyes can be made naturally from plants. Have students predict the color of the dye. Afterward, ask students to research the pigment.
2. Boil about 500 ml of water. Add 1 cup of blackberries. Simmer for 30 minutes to make the dye.
3. Hold cheesecloth over the jar with the cloth dipping into the jar. Pour the dye into the jar. The cheesecloth will catch the berry particles. Discard berries. Seal jar.
4. Use the paint brush to spread the dye on the paper. Record the results.⁹

Eat

Sweet and Nutritious

Blackberries are an excellent source of fiber (38% of the Daily Value) and vitamin C (50% of the Daily Value). A cup of fresh blackberries has about 62 calories, 7 grams of fiber and 30 mg of vitamin C. They are free of cholesterol and low in fat and sodium.^{4,7-8,10}

Fun Fact: Blackberries are one of the top ten fruits with the highest antioxidant rating!⁴

Soluble fiber can help lower cholesterol. Insoluble fiber aids digestion. Vitamin C helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, protects us from infections and bruising, aids in healing, keeps our gums healthy, helps our body absorb iron and folate from plants, and acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage. Raspberries offer a variety of phytochemicals—flavonoids, ellagic acid, lutein, etc. Phytochemicals act as antioxidants preventing or repairing cell damage. Anthocyanidins, a flavonoid sub-group, contribute to the blue, red and purple pigments of fruits. Anthocyanidins may also help with maintaining brain and healthy immune function. Anthocyanidins and ellagic acid help boost antioxidant defenses in cells and neutralize free radicals that may damage cells.^{4,11}

Find

For more blackberry facts and resources, visit:

1. North Carolina Raspberry & Blackberry Association, www.raspberryblackberry.com
2. University of Maine, <http://umaine.edu/publications/2066e>
3. N.C. State Extension, <http://rubus.ces.ncsu.edu>
4. Oregon Raspberries & Blackberries, www.oregon-berries.com
5. Georgia Extension, <http://extensionuga.edu/agriculture/ag-fruits-vegetables/blackberries>
6. California Harvest of the Month, <http://harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov>
7. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
8. Fruits & Veggies More Matters®, www.fruitsveggiesmorematters.org
9. PBS, www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/education/activities/3205_vinland.html
10. USDA Food Composition Databases, <http://ndb.nal.usda.gov>
11. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org